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LYRICS AND SONNETS

LOUIS HOW





LA PRINCESSE PREND L'AIR

PAINTED BY NATHANIEL COBB

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OF MISS RUTZ-REES

ROSEMARY HALL, GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT

LYRICS AND SONNETS

BY
LOUIS HOW
//



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1911

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TO
MY MOTHER

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LYRICS

SLAVIC FOLK-SONG

ADAPTED

Nothing was whiter, I used to say,
Than your little body. Every way
I was enraptured and ravished: naught
Of feeling stronger than that, I thought

Ah, but today! Today I know.
You are whiter far than a week ago.
And the feeling I have as I stoop to kiss,—
The other was weak as the dust to this!

“ POOR TOM’S A-COLD ”

“ POOR Tom’s a-cold ! ” The wintry wind
Turns into bitter ice the rain
Soaking his mantle. “ Never mind,”
Says Patience ; “ Summer comes again.”

“ Poor Tom’s a-cold ! ” However chill
His heart, it has the warmth to yearn
For vanished love and hope. “ Be still,”
Says Patience ; “ Youth will not return.”

HENLEY

His "songs were once of the sunrise";
They are of the sunrise yet,
With the birds to the dawn full-throating
And the green marsh-grasses wet,
And the wisps of pink clouds floating
Like birds of a higher wing:
To him it is ever sunrise,
It is always youth and spring.

He sings to his sweetheart, singing;
And this is his song's chief theme:
It is good to be men as we are men,
And to front the sun's first beam
Naked and frank,— what then!
Living our life is the thing!
His lust is a wholesome singing;
It is always youth and spring.

Sorrow keeps dogging us always —
Drown what we can in drink!
What overreaches us, scorn it;
Pain cannot make a man shrink.
For the sake of the joys we've borne it,
Life with its sudden sting;
And so were we glad to always,—
It is always youth and spring!

THE NURSERY

REFLECTED in his mother's eyes
He lies upon the hay,
And jewelled toys of kingly size
Are his, if he would play.

He is too weak, too small:
He stares at the stars o'erhead,
Till a rapture moves among them all
To dance above the shed.

CHRIST'S DOVES

THE child Christ played
With other little boys,
Made
Them little clay doves for toys.

“ Fly, little bird ! ”
He said, and they
Heard
His voice and flew away.

Foolish little things !
For if I possessed
Wings,
I'd fly and nestle on his breast.

THE TOWER

YOUR lofty lonely tower is round,
Carven with marble lace.
There is often little sound:
I have even seen your face.

So swiftly the years have murmured past,
There is nothing I have done.
I am of lowly caste,—
You are the height of the sun.

Though you were benignly to stoop your
birth,
Your life is a gem-cut goal;
And I have remained near earth,—
There must be caste in soul.

Your tower were scorned could a weakling
scale:
Thank God that is higher, higher,—
Divinely beyond my pale!
It is good always to aspire.

OUR LADY OF APPARENT FAILURE

THE old, old thought is all I have of thee.

Thy hair is dead, thy kiss long gone, thy
voice . . .

I dream of thee as sitting by the Blessed
Mother's knee;

And thy gentle, gentle singing makes her
grievous heart rejoice.

All the soul I had

Was a shade of thy sweet soul's reflection
. . .

The Queen of Golden Heaven for her dead
Christ is sad,

And thy singing is her only one delection.—

O Christ, O Christ, I cannot dare to tell

My sinning since she's gone from me, for
fear

Lest, while I'm burning evermore in hell,

Her song, her song may be too far to hear.

THE STRIPES

I WAKE, and the darkness is still: I lie
 Yearning with peace in my bed,—
Such peace as I hope for after I die;
 Perhaps even now I'm dead.

The dawn comes making my window grey.
 Morning is sombre and chill;
And I am not dead: it's another day.
 But I still can sleep, and I will.

But I only doze, and a dingy flock
 Of memories gather, mute
And mocking. There thunders a sudden
 knock!
 I spring for my prison suit.

LANTERNS

Thus we look, thus others think
And others say we are.
Day must bring us meat and drink,
But night will bring a star.

The night will bring a cooling breeze
And the quiet of a room.
Lie still, lie still ! 'Tis nights like these
Hang lanterns in the tomb.

A HEAD IN THE GLYPTOTHEK

To love this sweetly-coloured, perfect face,
Suffused so calmly with an ordered grace,
That were to have a love forever sure,
Incapable of roaming, still demure ;

A love recipient on whom to spend
Untroubled faith till life and loving end ;
A love who certainly would never start
A flame of apprehension in your heart.

No, nor of expectation, to arouse
Those longings supersensual where house
Our faith and hope and tenderness. Above
All beauty, what we cling to most is love :

Something that will respond and understand,
And tremble to the pressure of a hand ;
Imperfect, inexpressive, yet complete
In yearning to be ever strong and sweet.

SOLACE

My soul dies for the want
Of love. Old dreams that haunt
My soul are very grey and gaunt.

You are so far away,
Who with a kiss could stay
My longings every night and day.

Then hold it not amiss
I long for any kiss,
Rather than be reduced like this

To hunger in distress,
Unable to possess
The greater comfort or the less ; —

And through the days of pain,
Spoiled with unceasing rain,
That I must reach with gnawing pain

Toward any minor love
That might remind me of
Your tenderness, your touch, above

All longing, all desire,—
That sheer and utter fire
To even whose pale glow and specious
shadow I aspire.

BROWNING IN VENICE

I NEVER saw him but in print,
That Browning whom I praise and prize,
Who'd pack the whole world in a hint
And open heaven to our eyes.

However, had I seen him here,
My first proceeding were t' uncover;
My next, to tell him, "Master dear,
All of mankind loves a lover.

"And a lover loves the earth,
In and outside and around it:
You are one ordained by birth
Capable of love, who found it;

"Out of many million souls
One, for whom the world was good,
Since the centre where it rolls
Was exactly what you would."

Browning would have smiled and said,
"Each man has his proper credo.
'Ware the sunshine on your head!
Are you going to the Lido?"

HANDS

If eyes can speak, then hands,
For one who understands
Their melody, can sing
The sole important thing.

The mouth and even eyes
Are capable of lies :
But what hearts really feel
The fingers can't conceal.

So two that always go
With hand in hand, can know
All things, can still be sure
That love is quite secure.

SHEPHERD'S SONG

VALDANIENE

My coat on my shoulder, the mountains ahead,
I stand on the hill-top and play to my sheep.
Five are the notes of my willow fife;
They make me laugh and they make me weep.

The sunset is red, but the sunset is cold.
Down in the valley the reapers still sing.
Candles light up in the village below.
I wait for the girl and the bread she will
bring.

Now I am hungry and now I am tired.
Night in the open is lonely and chill,
I will play louder, perhaps she will hurry;
Girls may get frightened alone on a hill.

YOUR TROPHY

WHEN I have crawled, worn out with tears,
Crushed by the sorrow of all my years,
Which suddenly has bowed me, piled
Upon my neck, you never smiled,

Reproaching me or comforting ;
But have accepted what I bring,
Sat silent, let me grip you tight.—
This is your trophy which I write.

ILLUSION

BEING alone, I find
The world more real, more kind.
If I sit still, I hear
A voice well-known and dear.

If, while I hold me dumb,
The mouth would only come
And give my mouth a kiss
One half so real as this,

I would sit here all day
Wasting my life away,
Tasting that heavenly touch,
And grieving not so much.

SENTIMENTALITY

How sentimental and brave was I

In the beautiful flaming days of my youth!

“It is better to die for a lovely lie,”

I said, “than to live with an ugly truth.

“It is better to think there are some men true

And tender, that love after all exists,

And to stake one's fate on the unfound few,

Though it fasten a chain around the wrists.

“Fettered, with heaven inside the cell,

Is better than starving of soul and free,

For I cannot dwell in these streets of hell

Which other men's minds have arranged for
me.”

Such was the sentimental stuff

That I thought, for it fitted my youthful will.

“Life is good enough, if we are brave enough!”

I believed. And by heaven, I believe it still!

SORROW AND YOU AND I

SORROW and you and I,—
More of a biting bliss
Here, than when casual pleasures fly
Flocking around a kiss.

Let us cling tight, we three!
Joy has no deeper pang.
I see your sad eyes, I dream of the sea,
I remember a song you sang.

Others eat joy and laugh.
We of the half-guessed smile
Envy them not! they know but the half:
Love lasts a little while.

But love that is turned to pain,
Shared as by you and me,
Searches us through, makes us over
again,
And lasts everlastingly.

SALTARELLO

VALDANIENE

DARK in a corner a faun of a fellow,
Clad in a sheepskin from shoulders to hips,
Drones from a bag-pipe a gay saltarello,
And out of the laughing crowd Cesare slips:
He clutches Francesco and drags him awlirl.
And the two, with eyes gleaming, cigars in
their lips,—
Out of which the blue spirals incessantly curl,—
Begin balancing, elbows a-kimbo. The
crowd
Press around in a circle, one pulls back a girl.
The room becomes hazy with smoke; and the
loud
And regular rhythm of the music keeps going.
The pair in the centre, now upright, now
bowed,
Advancing, retreating, with jumps, heel-and-
toeing,
Keep excellent time. And the rest, one by
one,
Resort to a keg where the red wine is flowing,
And draining a glassful return to the fun.
Luigi, whose heels are beginning to tickle,
Darts out from the circle. When he has be-
gun

To balance to Cesare, hardy and fickle,
 Francesco retires, with mopping of brow.
 Thereon Pasqua Rosa, as keen as a pickle,
Who sees that her husband is in for it now
 To dance half the evening, withdraws with
 shy glances
 Beyond the excitement and heat of the row,
Beyond all the noise of the music and dances,
 And out of the garden-door, into the air,
 Warm, fragrant with peach-blossom. Then,
 as it chances
Pasquale strolls after and catches her there.
 She escapes from his arms, and excited at
 this,
 He redoubles his efforts, she falls in the snare,
He removes his cigar and he gives her a kiss.

NOTRE CŒUR

I KEEP a love to embrace,
And one to cling to.
One has a changing face,
The which I sing to:

And is for me the night
Of moonbeams fingering
Silence and shade, hushed light,
And odours lingering

In stolen garden spot,
To full ecstatic
Witchery, heavy, hot,
Unenigmatic.

The other is a warm,
Slow-moving morning:
Unwearied, patient form!
Without a warning

I weep upon its lap;
Say nothing, maybe;
Then soothed, turn over, nap,
Calm as a baby.

FOR REMEMBRANCE

PLANT me a little flower,
Show me a constant star,
Which, in the fatal hour
When you no longer *are*

(Dead or alive, who knows?
To me no longer *you*:
The second person grows
A third, when lost to view),

One, with its mild perfume,
One, with its twinkling beam,
May bring into my room
The image of this dream,

So real, my heart shall yearn
Toward now ; shall suffer pain
Wishing that it might burn
With love for you again.

A CYNICAL SENTIMENTALIST

USE me,
If it give you pleasure;
Throw me, if you will, away:
Still the stars will not abuse me;
I can measure
My remaining strength against the day.

Morning
And the dewy stretches
Where the sunshine falls oblique,
Will accept me without scorning.
All poor wretches
Find the mountains silent when they speak.

Cattle
Pasturing together
Will regard with kindly eyes
Him who's vanquished in the battle:
And the weather
Darken not when desperation cries.

Breezes
Blowing o'er the ocean
Fan the countenance of woe,
And the patient water eases
With its motion
Whomsoever lays him down below.

Knowing
This, I have a feeling,—
Knowing too the human mind,—
Sorrow will not be long going;
I'll be stealing
Kisses presently from one more kind.

Taken
With this understanding,
Let's be prodigal of kisses:
Either you or I may waken
On the landing
Where the stairs ascend to better blisses.

SONNETS

THE SALT MEADOWS

LOVELY are those salt meadows where the sea
Sings low. They have a rampart of live
rocks,
With tidal pools whose every starfish mocks
In purple pallor what frail flowers there be
Among the brackish grass; the breezes free
Glisten with foam; on the horizon flocks
Of fishing-boats are standing.— Here with
locks
Wind-blown and blond comes my heart's dear
with me.
We loaf together, albeit there is set
A gulf profound dividing her from me far;
Which is my love,— o'er it can neither go.
And yet we're very near each other, yet
We are happy in the sunshine. Lovely are
Those salty meadows where the sea sings low.

RAIN

THE rain's incessant murmur in the air
Wakes the attention, keeps it breathed, alert.
Embrowned by wet, familiar things exert
Deeper impressions; there is something rare
About the tree-trunks in the public square.
The listless sparrows, far from being pert,
Huddle beneath a stoop; while dogs, inert,
Hold, with their eyes askance, some casual
lair.
The solitude, the silence of a city
Drenched and deserted, strike the wayfarer;
His sight, his fancy see the world more
clearly;
It seems more real.— And thus the eyes of pity
Discern in weeping faces character
A sunny smile has not, or latent merely.

“ DU BIST DIE RUH’ ”

In an old German saying is expressed
The sentiment of everything I write:
You are not merely my extreme delight,
But infinitely more,— you are my rest.
You are the realm beyond the East and West,
Whose tempered sun is perfect to the sight;
You are the hush within the deep of night,
When weary hands lie heavy on the breast.
Out of the friction of all human life
The sparks keep flying, and make history;
While seers half-blinded dream, beyond the
lands
Of night and morning, a calm mystery
Wherein is no more troubling. . . .
From the strife
I creep into my haven between your hands.

A LIVING LIFE

To bathe in sunshine all the livelong day,—
From when the silvery dew upon the grass
Vanishes wetly in the rays that pass
Athwart the apple-branches, pink and grey,—
Through the long noon which drives the cows
away
To pasture-corners where the shadows
mass,—
And the long waning afternoon: alas!
Its hours, a series of lingering deaths are
they,—
Till the huge sun sinks downward 'mid the gold,
Touches the earth, and leaves it to the dark,—
And then to watch the stars beloved of old,
Come tentatively forth, till they are rife
In over half the world the eye can mark —
That were in truth to lead a living life.

LA PRINCESSE PREND L'AIR

FOR A PICTURE

REMEMBRANCES of her far Eastern land
Flocked in the loggia: with her eyes half-
closed,
The Princess brooded o'er them while she
dozed.
The feathered Amazon, elect to stand
Behind her naked shoulder, calmly scanned
The sunshine disapprovingly. Light posed,—
Arms on the wall,—the other lady glozed
In fancy, on the passing horsemen's band.
Thus were they often situate years ago,
Each of the three with silent longing
worked,—
A trinity of melancholy leisure.
Thus on the canvas fixed, they richly glow,
They and the sorry beauty where they
lurked,—
Deathless but without pain, to bring us pleas-
ure.

THE PROTESTANT CEMETERY

ROME

I KNOW not who was Caius Cestius.

His pyramid is by the city gate,

Where rows of cypress, standing black and
straight,

Mark their own city, quiet, ominous.

Poor little Keats, no longer amorous,

Or unrequited, lies there, now grown great:

And Shelley, who may be aware — too
late? —

If he was right or merely marvellous.

Certain have knowledge of heaven; I have none.

I were content to learn the earth beneath,

The hearts of men, the secrets in them hid.

Knowing, perhaps I'd long that life were done

And I were lying, careless of a wreath,

Near Caius Cestius's pyramid.

A NIGHT VISION

VAGUE in the shadowy moonlight on the lawn,—
Seen and unseen while weaving a design
Around and round the silver-columned pine,
There came last night and danced a naked
faun.

Danced long and all alone; and I withdrawn,
Breathless behind my shutter,—drunk, as
wine
Could never make me,—gazed these eyes of
mine
Tired, though I was not sleepy,—till the
dawn.

I'd no impetuous longing to be beckoned
To throw aside my clothing and descend
And join his gladsome riot on the dew.
But heartily I yearned,—and every second
Redoubles yearning until absence end,—
For you there, close beside me, breathless too.

THE FAUN

I

THE Greeks have left us evidence in art
How good and charming man might still have
been,
Had he remained more natural, and not seen
Complex desires blossom in his heart.
They made the frolic faun, species apart
From normal man, grosser but more serene,
Slightly though plainly bestial, and yet
clean,—
Man uncorrupted by the school and mart;
And debonair. Whether he brings the wine,
Or sits on the emptying wine-sack, whether
skips
Balancing on his wand, or pipes divine
And simple music that naïvely slips
Sweet on the air,—his eyes with laughter
shine
And always there's a tune upon his lips.

THE FAUN

II

SEEKING to catch it, let it then behove
Our wisdom to consider less the taint
Of animality, well-marked but faint,
Than the serenity where we see him move,
Slipping along the self-same heavenly groove
Where the sun and the other stars, without
constraint,
Are moved by love. The most unworldly
saint
And he, teach the same lesson,— teach and
prove.
Too often we expect some mighty deed
To mark off one from another sacred day;
Too often into grief and mourning read
Some clearer sense than joy could e'er display.
The fauns proclaim the secret lore we need:
They know a sacred reason to be gay.

SUGGESTION

THE wreath of yellow daisies on her locks
 Showed lovelier than they, whose only boast
 Was youthful fulness. And her eyes at
 most
 Had but the deep tranquillity of the ox.
Her breath came sweetly from a mouth that
 mocks
 Without enchanting. Even when engrossed
 In lively games, her movements lacked the
 ghost
 Of grace. She was less pretty than her
 frocks.
And yet, the faun that dances on my shelf
 Was, unto her, a candle to a star.
 He is a thing of beauty ; she an elf
Who conjures dreams of beauty better far.
 For though she is not lovely in herself,
 She makes us think, how lovely children are.

SAN LORENZO, FUORI LE MURA

TO P. F.

SAINT LAWRENCE, Christian martyr, suffered
here.

Smooth greenish marble monoliths align

Their sturdy forms in his decorous shrine:

The altar stands beneath a strange, austere,

And colonnaded baldaquin: there peer

From out mosaics oddly Byzantine,

Prophets and Christ sinisterly divine,

Mute witnesses of their millennial year.

Church of your predilection: underhand

But noble; formal,— baffling: in whose style,

So tender and so cold, you imaged me.

That chill dim heavy cloister, with its brand

Of carnal worship, in how swift a while

Sank overwhelming in our memory.

ACCEPTANCE

LIFE lures with many a splendid bribe the
traitor

To merely his own vague and subtle soul:

A slight concession of a barren Pole

May earn a kingly realm below the Equator.

Again, life lacks the casual instigator;

There's no one on the road to levy toll,

No one to tempt us toward or from a goal;

No cohort to proclaim me imperator.

The way that we receive, await, reject,—

The attitude wherein we laugh or groan,—

Outvalues all the guerdons we expect.

Our manner toward the universe, alone

Gauges our worth. Unable to select

Life's offers, yet acceptance is our own.

SPRING IN ROME

FROM the exalted garden,— where, afar,
Upon the dim Campagna, the low sky,
Pallid with subdued brightness, drops to
lie,—

I saw the sea, aglitter like a star :
And felt no more the wintry winds that are,
But felt the spring. The moment going by
Filled me with languorous ecstasy, and I,—
Rapt in a day-dream,— lay on sands that
bar

With golden bound, the ever-surgings ocean
From the warm soft sweet shores of Italy.
I knew the restless ache of spring's commo-
tion ;

And, as a part of Nature's entity
I had the lust to lie, drinking her potion,
Desirous, yet contented just to *be*.

A NEW MAN

I

WHEN I arise each morning from my bed,
It is a person new-created rises ;
Ready to wage the battle for life's prizes,
Untroubled by the past, for that is dead.
Beyond polite apology, what's said
Of yesterday is vain : a smile suffices.
And if tomorrow offer mere surmises,
My wounds are healed which overnight still
bled.
Today brings opportunity enough
For exercising energy and pluck.
My bungled doings extant furnish stuff
To work anew with better skill. And luck,
Who heretofore was only strange or gruff,
May now disclose a golden lead unstruck.

A NEW MAN

II

Therefore will I arise and get me hence
And say not, "O my Father, I have sinned!"
But let it go, keep mum, preserve my wind
To tackle the next mountain; count my pence,
And in the tavern, like a man of sense,
Buy me of eggs and coffee, and something
tinned,
That, when I reach the summit where I've
pinned
My hope, I still have body's maintenance.
But I'll divide my meagre store in two,
And on provisions not expend the whole:
I'll buy a stalk of blossoms, white in hue
And sweet in smell, to carry to the goal;
For breakfast nourishes the flesh, it's true,
But the narcissus-flower feeds the soul.

COURAGE

'Tis foolishness to call existence good ;
Mere lack of observation to cry, bad ;
Futile to think to better it. What we've had
On this inchoate earth, in likelihood
We'd have again. We are not merely wood,
But furnished out with brains ; and we are
mad
Unless we struggle against being sad.
Cowardice was the hill where my cross stood.
We know not who is moving us at will,
“ Impotent pieces ” : but we surely know,
Unable to resist the movement, still
We can resist not caring where we go.
We can cry out beneath the knocks that kill,
“ Heads up ! But I require a harder blow ! ”

PAIN'S USE

THE secret is,— to make your sorrow sing,
And join the unheard choruses exhaling
From tragedies of happinesses failing,
From every bent and bitter, futile thing.
Learn to enjoy the anguishes that bring
A sure empiric to the heart sore ailing
Behind the cheap misunderstandings veiling
That beauty pressed from hearts hard sorrows
wring.
If it were fed on sweets alone, the palate
Would sicken and the appetite would die.
There needs the ruthless pounding of a mallet
To fill the counterpoint of life. A cry
Is not discordant to a laugh. Fate's valet,
Pain, brushes garments which are you and I.

EPITAPH

HERE lies the languid body of my friend:
One who was valiant, intimate, and gay,
A little pensive, brave in his array,
Tender to point of anguish, hard to bend.
Nobly he sought, but uselessly, to lend
His native mind to what the churches say.
And when death took him suddenly away,
Which was it, a beginning or an end?
For me left here behind him, he is no more,
Who was my mate-in-arms, my playfellow,
My confidant, my solace in despair.
I had not visited his grave before.
The rest have all forgotten him, I know,
And I who do remember, scarcely care.

THE INSIDIOUS VOICE

Who is it speaking softly to my soul
In cautious words of augury and wonder,—
Saying, not alone the timorous go under,
Nor do the valiant always reach the goal:
Saying again, the weary world will roll
As well 'mid hush of peace as roar of thunder,
For everything is not achieved by plunder,
And none can tell us who is in control . . . ?
At first I listen breathlessly, and ask,
Will not this enemy behind the door
Purloin my gods from off the sacred shelf?
I shout, to hinder his subversive task
Against my soul: and when I hear no more
I recognize the voice,— my soul itself.

VILLA MEDICI

DARLING, above this terrace, where our grief,
Perplexity, and strange entanglement
Paced in a crowd around us where we went,
Rise the enormous pines, in high relief
Against the heaven: in a single sheaf,
Beauty and strength are magnified and blent.
A little while, our secret woe is spent,
As a mad wave is spent against a reef.
We cannot read our sorrows into Nature;
But let us read her beauty into them:
Let us awhile remember that our soul
Is tranquil too, and though of lesser stature
Is more divine,— a bell upon the hem
Of the High Priest who regulates the whole.

SANTA RESTITUDINE

VALDANIENE

By day, above Oricola a cloud
Huge, rounded, whitely-golden, always
hung,—
One of the regal regiment slow swung
Along the Abruzzi mountains regal-browed.
By night, the town was vanished. Once, when
loud
Rang the gay song, and laugh as gaily sung,
In our own village, showers of flame were
slung
Aloft, far-off, upon night's inky shroud.
'Twas fireworks in Oricola, I was told,
For Santa Restitudine,—“a saint
We don't believe in here.”—Green, scarlet,
gold
Spattered the void with sparks.—What sad
restraint
Precludes belief, when heaven is seen to hold
Joys unto which our mirrored joys are faint!

EXHORTATION

LADIES, parade your plumes and spreading
skirts:

And if the draught be chilly, pluck the lawn
Over your powdered bosoms. Pale and
drawn

Comes daybreak which your carmine discon-
certs.

What though but salve sanguinolent exerts
Its empire! — ye are rosier than the dawn;
And lighter-footed than the fleeing fawn
Who drops in leafy coverts while blood
spurts.

Exhibit glistening teeth, elusive smiles;
Stretch fingers to the lifted frock, the fan,
The rebel tress. Alert! Employ all wiles,
Traditional and instinctive, on the man,—
But not against him . . . Through the
allotted miles

Of ennui, he's your yoke-mate in the span.



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